

Topic Twelve – Responding to Resistance



Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

We are pleased to bring you ***“Responding to Resistance;”*** the twelfth in a series of communications that discuss the value that coaching brings to your management practice and team leadership. The content presented will provide an overview of how to effectively respond to resistance when delivering feedback and offer strategies for constructively responding to resistance. In addition to this message, this topic also includes a Knowledge Check that asks about the principles and strategies presented and a Job Aid with recommendations for responding to resistance.

To reference previous topics, please click on the Coaching Series Home link located in the Quick Links section of this web page.

Thanks for all you do.

Overview: Responding to Resistance

Even the best coaches run into resistance, especially when emotions run high. Resistance can occur during the feedback process when an employee:

- Doesn't agree with your version of the situations
- Doesn't accept responsibility for his or her actions
- Doesn't acknowledge the significance of his or her behavior

Resistance usually occurs when developmental feedback is being provided.

The seeking and providing of feedback is one of the most significant methods of assisting personal growth. It is important for you to respond to resistance effectively to communicate to the employee that you want to understand his or her perspective and feeling while still providing the coaching that is so important to his or her performance and professional development.

Remember in those moments when you receive resistance from an employee that your goal in responding is not to force someone to agree with you. Instead look for ways to mitigate the objections and make your feedback more palatable and more manageable. This approach will give an employee ample space to express himself or herself and to make the coaching relationship most productive for all involved.

It is also important to acknowledge the role diversity plays when resistance is present. As a coach, you need to consider where the resistance is coming from to most effectively address it. For example, consider you've asked an employee to take on a new responsibility that requires using a new technology system to grow his or

her technical skills. When you make the request, the employee is hesitant and does not want the opportunity. Your first instinct may be to assume the employee isn't motivated to develop the new technical skills or doesn't want to take on the extra work. Go a step further and ask yourself what else may be going on. Could the employee have a learning disability that makes using the technology system difficult? Maybe he or she isn't capable of doing what you've asked because of a physical disability? Or perhaps the employee is working through a personal issue that makes him or her reluctant to take on the extra work at this time? Consider all of the possibilities as you enter the conversation and provide a safe space for the employee to let you know what exactly is behind his or her resistance.

Benefits of Responding to Resistance

The benefits of responding to resistance are outlined below:

- Enhancing your understanding of your staff's feelings and allows you to more effectively tailor your feedback
- Encourages your staff to think critically about his or her emotions and then process and respond to your feedback in a constructive way

Enables you and your staff to put a plan in place to address the feedback and check-in on a regular basis to confirm the same situation doesn't happen again

Keys to Responding to Resistance

Follow the recommendations below to effectively respond to resistance:

Use questioning to dig deeper: Explore why the employee feels the way he or she does by asking open-questions, e.g., "what are you feeling", "tell me more about why you feel that way", "describe/explain exactly what your issue is."

Resist the urge to fill empty space: Let the employee use long pauses to reflect, reconsider, and elaborate on what he or she has said. Encourage employees to continue speaking using simple verbal cues, such as "uh-huh" or "go on."

Confirm your understanding: Before attempting to address the resistance, ensure that you actually understand the employee's problem by summarizing your understanding and explicitly asking if you've understood correctly.

Identify the kind of resistance you have received, and respond accordingly:

- If an employee is disagreeing with your characterization of what has happened, consider the possibility that your interpretation is based on judgments rather than objective facts. Rebuild your understanding of the situation by incorporating elements of the employee's position and by offering more details of which the employee may not be familiar or aware. "So, here's what happened...is that right?"
- If an employee blames others for what happened or won't take responsibility, focus the conversation on those elements over which the employee *does* have control and those elements with which you can assist. "I understand that this kind of situation arises. Could you...?"
- If an employee does not acknowledge the significance of the issue, ask the employee questions about the relationship between their actions and the consequences you've already described (in the Reason step of the EARN feedback process). "If you approach your coworker in that way, then how might we expect him or her to react?"

Address any resistance that exists within yourself: As a coach, you're expected to model appropriate

behavior. However, it's human nature to feel resistant in certain situations. Imagine that you and an employee haven't always seen eye to eye. It can be incredibly difficult to rise above your own resistance to the situation and do the right thing. Be aware of what you're thinking and feeling, and be prepared to leave your comfort zone. Remember you can seek guidance from your coaches and mentors to help you address these sorts of situations.

Define and confirm an action plan: Once you and the employee agree on the issues to be addressed, ask staff for suggestions on actions he or she can take to avoid the same situation in the future or to build his or her skills to better handle the situation. "How do you suggest we move forward from here?" Be prepared to offer your own recommendations, but when doing so, build from the employee's suggestions to build buy-in for the action plan. When you are done, summarize and confirm the next steps you have discussed.

Follow up: Defining an action plan does not end the response to resistance. As a coach, it is your responsibility to actively follow up with the employee. After a coaching or feedback conversation, always plan next steps to build on what you have discussed and to confirm that your coaching has the intended impact.

Next Steps

Activities: To support your coaching practice, take the time to reflect back on the 'Diffusing Difficult Situations' Role-play conference call from Topic #9 – how do the suggestions presented in those scenarios apply to responding to resistance? Please review the Responding to Resistance job aid and complete the worksheet.

- [Responding to Resistance Job Aid](#)
- [Resistance Scenarios Knowledge Check](#)
- [Resistance Scenarios Knowledge Check -Key](#)

Coming Next: Keys to Coaching Success – whether simple or complex – are very useful to making a coaching relationship collaborative and meaningful, instead of a "check the box" activity and is the next topic in this series. It will provide you with an overview of the potential pitfalls of coaching and how to turn those into success.